

Principles for the MIT Residential System

Report of a Working Committee

Faculty and Staff

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I. INTRODUCTION

In December 1997, President Vest charged the Academic Council with the task of establishing a set of long term principles and/or goals for the entire MIT residential system. This work, which was to be undertaken principally by the Education Committee of the Council chaired by the Provost, was one of several Presidential directives intended to improve the orientation of new students to MIT, our housing system and the process of residence selection. Other assigned tasks included: comprehensive planning for Orientation and housing changes to be implemented in the Fall 1998; and, the initiation of planning for a new campus residence hall.

The following Housing Principles statement is the final product of the Housing Principles Working Committee, chaired by Associate Provost Phillip L. Clay, which met several times between February and May 1998 to review past and current housing policy and establish a set of overarching principles for our residential system, based upon the President's charge. Committee members included representatives from key faculty, student, and staff groups responsible for planning for, advising on, and/or operating the residential system, including the Office of the Dean of Students and Undergraduate Education, the Committee on Student Environment, Housemasters, Dormitory Council, Interfraternity Council, the Office of the Senior Vice President for Operations, and the Planning Office. (Committee members are listed at the end of this document.)

The Committee's work included:

The creation of an extensive annotated bibliography of key housing policy documents and a historical

timeline of important events related to the MIT residential system;

The development of a set of draft principles for MIT housing grounded in these historical documents as well as recent reports authored by the Presidential Task Force on Student Life and Learning, the Ad Hoc Committee on Orientation and Residence for Fall 1998, and the Institute Dining Review Committee.

Extensive review and redraft of the Principles document, through several meetings of the Working Committee, as well as presentations to members of the wider MIT community.

The Committee did not consider current operating or assignment questions nor did they discuss the design or development details of building projects under consideration. These matters were deferred or assigned to others. The committee sought to frame a vision for what MIT should strive to effect in its residential system.

The Committee's work culminated in an April 21st large group presentation of the draft Housing Principles to faculty, student, and staff stakeholder groups. The response to the document at this meeting was quite positive; after lengthy discussion of each housing principle, the participants recommended several minor changes which were incorporated

into the final draft. The Housing Principles statement has since been presented for further review and refinement to the Faculty Policy Committee, the Education Committee of the Academic Council, and the President.

It is important to note that the following Housing Principles are not themselves the product of a comprehensive examination of the current MIT residential system. The Working Committee felt that such a review, while a worthy exercise, was beyond the scope and time frame of its charge. Instead, the Working Committee chose to ground its work in the findings and recommendations of past and recent committees which have examined our residential system in far greater depth—including seminal studies, such as the 1956 Report of the Faculty Committee on Student Housing to the President (RRyer CommitteeS), and the 1989 Report of the Freshman Housing Committee (RPotter Committee, S and more recent community processes, such as the 1997 Institute Dining Review Final Report, last year's Sense of the Faculty motion, and preliminary findings of the Presidential Task Force on Student Life and Learning. (While these Housing Principles were developed in advance of the release of the final Task Force Report in September 1998, their development was informed by draft Task Force documents and by Task Force members who also sat on the Working Committee.)

In fact, members of the Working Committee were impressed by the reoccurrence of familiar themes in many of these recent and historical documents; for instance, the importance of faculty/student interaction in the residential system; the social and intellectual benefits of common dining; and the opportunities generated by living in a residential community to promote responsible self-governance; to build a lively, supportive, and diverse collegiate community. Striking too was the fact that so little has changed in our residential system: shortcomings identified a generation ago, including overcrowding and the perceived dichotomy between the academic and out-of-classroom experience (the residence as RrefugeS), still persist. In some ways, conditions have worsened in recent decades, witnessed by

the elimination of common dining in many of the residence halls in the 80s, the effects of deferred maintenance, and our difficulty in establishing and enforcing a uniform code of conduct in all living groups.

Therefore, in order to strengthen the following Housing Principles, the Working Committee has also recommended below a mechanism for ensuring their implementation; namely, a Residence Council made up of residence system stakeholders, to advise the Dean of Students and Undergraduate Education and see that housing and residential issues get on-going, not episodic or disjointed attention.

This document is organized as follows. First, we present a brief Problem Statement, identifying critical issues in the residential system that the Housing Principles statement is intended to address. This is followed by a proposed Mission Statement for our residential system, a Statement of Principles, and a mechanism for implementation. Participants on the Housing Principles Working Committee are listed at the end of this document.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Since its move to Cambridge in 1916 and the completion of Senior House, MIT has been committed to providing housing designed to enhance the intellectual and personal development of its students. Over the years, the Institute's housing inventory has grown as a result of efforts to accommodate a larger student body, to enroll women, and to provide housing for single and married graduate students. The MIT residential system is also unique in its historic reliance on fraternities, sororities, and independent living groups to provide housing on- and off-campus for a sizeable portion of the undergraduate population. Tracing back to its roots as a regional technical institution and commuter campus. Today, sixteen undergraduate and graduate residence halls and thirty-eight fraternities, sororities and independent living groups comprise the residential system.

Beyond the bricks and mortar and the diversity of options, the MIT residential system is further characterized by a commitment to student choice, diverse traditions and lifestyles, and substantial student self-government. Students have historically expressed a high level of satisfaction with this system, particular its attributes of variety and choice, upperclassmen / freshmen mentoring and support, and student autonomy. However, surveys of undergraduates and recent alumni also point to shortcomings in the residential systems. Students point to the lack of diversity and tolerance across the residential system, the absence of faculty involvement and a strong Institute presence, overcrowding, and inadequate or poorly maintained facilities.

MIT is currently involved in an important evaluation of its educational mission, goals and structure. Two years ago, President Vest charged the Presidential Task Force on Student Life and Learning to Reexamine its institutional purpose in the context of multiple forces for change, and more specifically, to Reexamine the educational benefits derived from living in a residential community. The results of this work will shape the decision-making platform for housing development in the future. In addition, the Residential Systems Integration Team has introduced a unified housing and residential life organization at MIT which incorporates buildings, operations and programs. Complementing this effort, the Institute Dining Review Final Report provides plans for a new model of food service to better meet

the dining requirements of the MIT community. Recent and planned investments new housing and in the renovation of existing buildings provide additional opportunities to improve the residential system.

Notwithstanding this progress and the perceived level of student satisfaction, there are many challenges that remain:

There is an inadequate supply of housing to meet our current commitment to provide housing to all undergraduates and fifty percent of graduate students who desire to live in MIT residence halls.

While much of our housing is in relatively good condition, we face a backlog of deferred maintenance.

While student self-government is an important MIT tradition, we have not met the challenge of incorporating the housemasters, faculty, graduate resident advisors, staff, and alumni into the life of the residences and living groups to ensure appropriate standards of conduct and supervision. The level of supervision of students varies not only between FSILGs and residence halls, but also among residence halls of different sizes and configurations.

And, while the Institute has stated many times over its history its commitment to providing housing to enhance the intellectual and personal development of its students, we have yet to articulate a vision of what such housing might look like, or to develop a plan for upgrading our current residential system's facilities and programs to achieve this vision.

These challenges provide the framework for the Committee's work.

III. Principles for the MIT Residential System

A. Mission Statement

The mission of the MIT residential system is to support the education of our students in the broadest sense, including their intellectual growth and development of life skills by:

developing facilities of the highest quality that support the residential system's broader educational mission;

ensuring faculty and student interaction and intellectual engagement;

promoting responsible student self governance;

enriching the residential experience by providing exposure to diverse cultures, ideas, and perspectives; and,

maintaining a range of housing options while ensuring that each residence on- and off-campus adheres to the same high standards and rules of conduct.

B. Housing Principles

The residential system should be governed by the following principles:

1. Promote Excellence in Our Residential System

MIT's residential system's physical facilities and environment; its organization and programs should be of the highest quality, in keeping with the standards of a world-class academic institution. In order to achieve this high level of quality:

The residential system should provide safe, well-maintained facilities that provide space for quiet study, informal student and faculty/student interaction, group study, programs, dining, and recreation. Each facility in the residential system, be it a residence hall or a privately owned fraternity, sorority, or independent living group, should meet the same physical standards of excellence.

Planning for the residential system should be proactive and guided by an overarching set of principles and standards and should not be compromised by short-term needs.

The programs and activities, which occur in the residential system should be thoughtfully designed, adequately funded, well-staffed, and executed to support the residential system's mission.

2. Develop the Whole Student

The whole complex of living facilities must be skillfully arranged to provide the kind of environment that contributes to the development of leadership, breadth, and standards of taste and judgement among our students to give them the fullest possible opportunity to acquire, in a phrase of Sir Richard Livingstone's, a sense of the first rate.

--MIT President James R. Killian, Jr., Inaugural Address, 1949

MIT should embrace the potential educational benefits derived from living in a residential community. In furtherance of this goal, and in concurrence with the recommendations of the Presidential Task Force on Student Life and Learning:

Faculty and students should explore ways to integrate formal and informal learning into the life of their residences. Such opportunities might include:

enrichment in the arts and humanities not offered as part of the curriculum;

exploration of leadership ability, personal skills, and career options;

exposure to people of diverse interests and backgrounds;

mentoring, advisorship, and peer support activities; and,

participation in team activities and self-governance.

Faculty have a responsibility to assist in the intellectual and personal development of students in all areas of their Institute experience. MIT should acknowledge, and its incentive system support, the enormous educational value of faculty participation in the residential system. It must reaffirm the place of the Housemaster as the intellectual leader of the residence hall.

Alumni/ae, visiting scholars, graduate students, and staff also have important roles to play as mentors in supporting the development of our students in the residential system and should likewise receive Institute support and encouragement.

The Institute must provide role definitions, support and training to faculty, alumni/ae, graduate students, and staff participating in the residential system.

Future development and renovation of residences should allocate sufficient space for intellectual and study programs and for student/faculty interaction, including, where appropriate, additional residences for members of the faculty.

3. Build Supportive Communities

The residential system should foster the development of supportive communities at several different scales: at the RmicroS level within a residence (hall, floor, suite, etc.), at the level of the residence, and at the Institute level, based upon students' pursuit of personal interests and participation in campus-wide activities. Therefore:

MIT residences should be designed to facilitate quiet study in student rooms, group activities in common spaces, as well as recreational and social life. The programming in the residences should support students (and faculty) in addressing and managing pace and pressure in a healthy and productive manner.

In new residences, dining facilities should explicitly be included as a means of fostering community and programs within the house. The Institute should continue to provide a variety of dining options around the campus for convenience and so that students from different residences may interact.

Where appropriate, common facilities located in residence halls, such as exercise space, dark rooms, music rooms, and dining halls, should be made available for use by all students as a way of promoting cross-residence interaction and better use of our resources.

The physical relationship among the residencesQthe spaces, paths, and nodes that connect themQshould foster community interaction and cross-residence socializing. New undergraduate residences should be located in close proximity to the MIT campus in order to promote community life.

4. Promote Community Self-Governance

The residential system should promote responsible community governance as a means of developing leadership skills, building self-esteem, and fostering self-reliance and civic responsibility.

All members of a residence—students, Housemasters, graduate resident advisors, Faculty Fellows, and where desirable, alumni—should participate in the design of programs and governance, and in so doing establish the community obligations that form the social contract.

In keeping with the goal of reducing pace and pressure, expectations for student participation in the residential system should not be unduly burdensome. The aim of student self-governance should be to support the intellectual and personal growth of the residents. Students, faculty, and alumni/ae in the residential system should address the question, "What is the 'right' work for students to be doing in the residences?" In addition, in its support of student self-governance, the Institute should not abdicate its ultimate responsibility for the management and operation of its facilities.

5. Provide for Thoughtful and Well-Informed Choices Within the Residential System

MIT should continue to offer a broad range of housing options, including residence halls, theme houses, independently owned fraternities, sororities and independent living groups, and co-ed and single-sex accommodations. In doing so, the Institute must ensure that each on- and off-campus residence adheres to the same high standards and rules of conduct and supports MIT's broader educational mission.

Students should be provided with sufficient information so that they can make thoughtful, well-informed decisions with minimum stress about their living arrangements. Housemasters, upperclass students, graduate resident advisors, faculty, alumni/ae, and staff should participate together in introducing students to the residential system.

We respect the diversity, interests, backgrounds, life styles, and values that students bring to MIT. We further respect that in exercising their choice among residential options, students may have different impulses, including:

the wish to live with peers of similar interests or backgrounds; and,

the wish to live in a diverse community with peers from a variety of interests or backgrounds.

In either case, the Institute must ensure that students demonstrate respect, tolerance, and acceptance of one another.

Membership in an on- or off-campus residence entails an implied social contract. Upperclass students have a distinct mentoring and peer support responsibility to incoming residents. Likewise, incoming students agree to participate in the life of the residence and abide by its rules.

6. The Institute Should Support the Implementation of These Principles.

The Institute's commitment to its residential system is manifested in several areas, including:

the resources it allocates to operate and maintain its residences;

the incentives and support it provides to community membersQfaculty, alumni/ae, students, and staffQwho take part in and support the residential system; and,

its follow-through on and consistency in new initiatives to improve the residential system.

The Institute should expect and ensure the same level of excellence in its residential system as it currently does of its research and academic programs. It must reaffirm the central place of its residential system in the educational mission of MIT.

C. Graduate Housing Issues

These principles were developed as part of the Institute's visioning process to address policy issues at the undergraduate level. Many of these principles may apply to graduate housing as well. We recommend that a similar effort be carried out to explore the special and unique principles related to graduate housing. Such an effort would require the participation of graduate student life stakeholders including representatives of the Dean for Graduate Education and the Graduate Student Council.

D. Implementation

1. Residence Council

While some implementation features are suggested in the sections above, the primary mechanism for implementing these housing principles is the creation of a Residence Council to advise the Dean of Students and Undergraduate Education. The Dean's office has recently assumed expanded authority for oversight of the entire residential system.

We have been severely crippled in the past because critical decisions related to residential life have been assigned to many different officers. Not only does this lead to a diffusion of responsibility and inaction, it also complicates getting advice and building consensus on programming, management and new development. To address these issues, we propose a Residence Council.

The benefits of the Residence Council include:

a predictable forum and venue for the regular interaction and consultation among residence system stakeholders;

assurance that housing and residential issues will get on-going, not episodic or disjointed attention; and,

a framework for ensuring that initiatives reflect a consensus on academic/residence matters, student life, campus affairs and management issues related to the residential system.

The Residence Council would be advisory to the Dean, who has executive and managerial responsibility for all matters related to the residential system. The charge of the Residence Council will be to:

- serve as a forum for residence-related, cross-cutting issues;
- consider proposals for new construction;
- frame the scope and goals of residential renovation projects;
- identify priorities for residential programming;
- integrate residence-related goals with campus activities goals;
- encourage and collaborate on long-range planning;
- evaluate the operation of the housing system against the goals listed above; and,
- advise senior Institute officers on any and all matters relating to student residential life.

The Residence Council should include representatives from the following stakeholders and offices. Attention should be given to balancing composition with size. A manageable size being no more than 10 persons.)

Office of the Dean of Students and Undergraduate Education ;

Dean for Undergraduate Curriculum, ex officio;

Departments that report to the Executive Vice President, including the Planning Office and Physical Plant;

Student leaders, including students from the Inter-Fraternity Council, ILGs

Dormitory Council, etc.;

Housemasters;

Graduate Resident Advisors;

Graduate Student Council ;

Office of the Dean for Graduate Education;

Faculty members and;

Alumnus/na

APPENDIX

IV. HOUSING PRINCIPLES WORKING COMMITTEE

A. Faculty and Administration

Margaret R. Bates, Dean for Student Life

Jean P. De Monchaux, Professor, Urban Studies and Planning, Chair, Committee on Student Environment

Andrew M. Eisenmann, Associate Dean, Director, Residential Life and Student Life Programs

Stephen D. Immerman, Director of Administration and Operations, Office of the Senior Vice President

Charles Stewart III, Housemaster, McCormick Hall, Associate Professor, Political Science, Member, Presidential Task Force on Student Life and Learning

O. Robert Simha, Director, Planning Office

Phillip L. Clay (Committee Chair), Associate Provost, Professor, Urban Studies and Planning

Eric Novak, Planning Officer, MIT Planning Office

Helen Samuels, Special Assistant to the Associate Provost, Provost's Office

B. Students

Duane H. Dreger, President, Interfraternity Council, member, Sigma Nu

Novice M. Johnson, resident, McCormick Hall

Ryan K. Pierce, Member, Undergraduate Association Executive Committee, Co-Chair, Committee on Housing and O/R, resident, East Campus

Ashesh P. Shah, President, Dormitory Council, resident, 500 Memorial Drive

Margaret C. Tsai, Member, Kappa Alpha Theta, resident, Burton Conner